

Message Text

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TO ALL EAST ASIAN AND PACIFIC DIPLOMATIC POSTS

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SUBJECT: US PRESS TREATMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS REPORTS

1. US PRESS COVERAGE OF DEPARTMENT'S 1978 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORTS SUBMITTED TO CONGRESS 2/9 HAS BEEN MODERATE AND FREQUENTLY UNFLATTERING. MOST MAJOR EAST COAST DAILIES CARRIED FRONT-PAGE NEWS ACCOUNTS AND A FEW FOLLOWED THESE WITH EDITORIALS. CRITICISM OF ISRAEL RELATED TO OCCUPIED TERRITORIES DOMINATED NEWS ACCOUNTS. SECONDARY FOCUS WAS ALLEGATION THAT IMPORTANT US ALLIES--SUCH AS IRAN AND SOUTH KOREA--WERE NOT TREATED AS CRITICALLY IN REPORTS AS LESS IMPORTANT COUNTRIES AS EXEMPLIFIED BY NICARAGUA. (THIS ALLEGATION MADE DESPITE FACT THAT REPORT ON PHILIPPINES WAS DESCRIBED BY PRESS AS AMONG MOST CRITICAL.) THIS THEME WAS ALSO TIED TO STATEMENTS
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PAGE 02 STATE 039292

BY UNIDENTIFIED GOVERNMENT SOURCES THAT OF ALL COUNTRIES CITED FOR ABUSES, ONLY NICARAGUA WILL BE PENALIZED BY CUT-OFF OF US ARMS SALES. STRESS ALSO GIVEN TO FACT THAT DESPITE FEW IMPROVEMENTS, GENERAL PICTURE WAS ONE OF REPRESSION OF RIGHTS IN ALL BUT FEW NON-WESTERN DEMOCRACIES.

2. MOST EDITORIALS HAVE FAULTED REPORTS FOR INCONSISTENT, Milder CRITICISM OF IMPORTANT VERSUS LESS IMPORTANT ALLIES. SEVERAL ALSO QUESTIONED WHETHER POLICY WAS NOT MANIFESTA-

TION OF CULTURAL ARROGANCE. HOWEVER, PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER UNDERScoreD BASIC IMPORTANCE OF POLICY AND CREDITED IMPROVEMENTS TO PRESIDENT AND CONGRESS.

3. SPECIFIC REPORTING ON EA COUNTRIES WAS GENERALLY ACCURATE AND MILD EXCEPT FOR DESCRIPTION OF PHILIPPINES AS THE WORST VIOLATOR OF RIGHTS IN THE AREA. MARCOS REGIME WAS SCORED FOR BOTH POLITICAL REPRESSION AND PERVERSIVE CORRUPTION. KOREA AND INDONESIA CITED AS CASES WHERE ABUSES STILL CONTINUE ALTHOUGH SOME IMPROVEMENTS MADE. HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION WAS DESCRIBED AS IMPROVED IN ROC, THAILAND AND MALAYSIA.

4. COVERAGE BEGAN PRIOR TO PUBLIC RELEASE OF REPORTS WITH GOSHKO ARTICLE IN WASHINGTON POST (2/7) WHICH PLAYED UP COMPARISON OF REPORTS ON IRAN AND SOUTH KOREA VERSUS LESS STRATEGICALLY IMPORTANT NICARAGUA. (POST HAD BEEN LEAKED COPIES OF THESE THREE REPORTS.) HIS WAS FIRST STORY TO MAKE POINT THAT ONLY NICARAGUA WOULD BE PENALIZED FOR ABUSES BY CUT-OFF IN ARMS SALES IN FY '7 BUDGET, A POINT UNDERScoreD TO REPORTER BY "INFORMED GOVERNMENT SOURCES." AN AP ACCOUNT, CARRIED IN WASHINGTON STAR FOLLOWING DAY, MADE SAME LINKAGES IN DEPARTMENT'S ALLEGED TEMPERING OF CRITICISM TOWARD MAJOR ALLIES; CUT-OFF IN MILITARY SALES TO LESS IMPORTANT NICARAGUA.

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PAGE 03 STATE 039292

EARLIER (2/8) POST EDITORIAL HAD DOUBLY FAULTED THE ADMINISTRATION (DEPARTMENT) ON THESE TWO POINTS.

5. ON 2/10, THE NEW YORK TIMES RAN THREE PIECES ON THE SUBJECT: A GWERTZMAN NEWS ACCOUNT NOTED THAT SOME IMPROVEMENTS WERE REPORTED IN SK, INDONESIA, THAILAND AND ROC. PAPER CARRIED EXCERPTS FROM REPORTS ON 19 COUNTRIES, INCLUDING ROC, INDONESIA, SK AND PHILIPPINES. AN UNSIGNED NEWS ANALYSIS STATED ADMINISTRATION OFFICIALS WERE CONCERNED THAT REPORTS OF "DEFERENTIAL TREATMENT" TOWARD MAJOR ALLIES WOULD AROUSE CONTROVERSY AND DEPICTED THE HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY IN GENERAL AS UNDER ATTACK FROM BOTH LIBERAL AND CONSERVATIVE CAMPS. ALSO APPEARING ON SAME DAY WAS A GOSHKO PIECE, VIRTUALLY IDENTICAL TO GWERTZMAN'S AND AN ITEM BY THE BALTIMORE SUN'S FERGUSON WHICH DEALT ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY WITH ISRAEL.

6. WITH ONE EXCEPTION, SUBSEQUENT EDITORIAL COMMENT TENDED TO BE NEGATIVE. THE WASHINGTON STAR (2/12) DESCRIBED THE DEPARTMENT AS A "COMMON SCOLD" AND QUESTIONED WHETHER POLICY ITSELF UNDERMINED INTENDED GOALS BY PLACING US IN POSITION OF ARROGANT, SELF-RIGHTEOUS NATION, SEEKING TO IMPLANT ITS MORAL IMPERATIVES ON OTHERS. THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR (2/13) WHILE SYMPATHIZING WITH THE BASIC INTENT OF HR POLICY, WAS SHARPLY CRITICAL OF THE ALLEGED INCONSISTENT TREATMENT OF IMPORTANT VERSUS LESS IMPORTANT ALLIED NATIONS. THE

EXCEPTION, A 2/14 PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER EDITORIAL,
GENTLY ALLUDED TO AFOREMENTIONED CRITICISMS BUT WENT ON
TO NOTE THAT PRESIDENT AND CONGRESS SHOULD BE CREDITED
WITH IMPROVEMENTS MADE IN IRAN, PHILIPPINES, SOUTH KOREA
AND INDONESIA. PAPER DID SUGGEST, HOWEVER, THAT US COULD
GET HR MESSAGE ACROSS BEST BY FIRST MAKING OUR OWN
COUNTRY A MODEL IN THIS RESPECT. VANCE

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